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REVIEW

POLIN. Studies in Polish Jewry. Volume Eighteen. Jewish Women in Eastern Europe, edited by Chaeran Freeze, Paula Hyman and Antony Polonsky, Oxford – Portland, Oregon, 2005.

Volume Eighteen of *POLIN* devoted to the Jewish Women' history has been edited by the two women – Chaeran Freeze, Associate Professor of East European Jewish History at Brandeis University and Paula Hyman, the Lucy Moses Professor of East European Jewish History at Yale University – and Professor Antony Polonsky, known well to all the readers of the previous volumes.

The female editors are also the authors of the introduction, which was ment to be the historical survey, presentation of the subject's historiography and a short review of the texts presented in the publication. Yet, the main goal has been accomplished in part only. The authors devote most of the attention to the period of from 1772 to 1917, and their main geographical area is not Eastern Europe in its contemporary common sence, but they – as well as most of this POLIN volume 18's authors – focuse on the Russian Empire's territory. The editors mentioned in the introduction "...eastern Europe," which has generally referred to the Russian Empire and Galicia (often described as the backwaters of the Austro-Hungarian empire), which explain in part their attitude to Eastern Europe being somehow limited to this part.

Considering the remarks above and the fact that there is only one man among the authors of the articles one may get surprised that the first article of the volume, followig the introduction part, is written by Moshe Rosman and it deals with the history of women in Poland (*The History of Jewish Women in Early Modern Poland: An Assessment*). Professor Rosman from Bar-Ilan University in Israel, presents some ideas of his current research on the subject of Jewish Women oin the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. Starting with the statesment that „there are virtually no Polish Jewish analogues to the detailed analyses of women's family, economic, social and religious life that can be read for Christian women in Europe and elsewere," the author presents and reffers to the "pioneer studies," which he found of the great importance: Shaul Stampfer, *Gender Differentiation and Education of the Jewish Woman in the Nineteenth--Century Eastern Europe*; Chava Weissler, *Voices of the Matriarchs*; and Iris Parush, *Nashim korot: Yitronah shel shuliyut* (Reading Woman: The Benefit of Marginality in the Nineteenth-Century East European Jewish Society). It's slightly misleading that Moshe Rosman uses the literature about the 19th century to open the text about the earlier period, yet once considering the lacking research mentioned above, one can understand such method. His article might be taken as the polemics with the previous reasons or excuses (as author suggests) of the Polish Jewish women absence in Poland's historiography: (Jewish) "women are simply invisible in the sources." He

counts the most obvious sources (used by the 3 mentioned authors) like the female-oriented Yiddish literature (centring on *tkhines*), statistics and communal documents (tax payers lists, property ownership documents, *pinkasim*, court protocols etc.), and memoirs. There is also a capture of/for discussing how Jewish women' history should be included in the main stream historiography, as for the 3 related authors is obvious it can't be just the additional part of the history understood as his-story (in contaradiction to her-story). They opt for something called "transformative approach" – once learning more about women it effects and transforms understanding of the entire history ("not just the parts when they appear")[1]. Yet, the autor provides the readers with the classification of male and female cultural spheres in Jewish life of Eastern Europe, their parallel existance and their implications, but also the dissagreement to/about their existance. The article ends up with many questions (regarding the subject) and they all leave us looking forward to the answers. Let us just hope that Moshe Rosman will offer them in the not so far future, or maybe there are women-historians who would find those answers first.

Certainly the sort of parralel (to men') writing or even competion motife can be found in the maskuline and feminine literature of the 19th century. Tova Cohen, from the Department of the Hebrew Literature at Bar Ilan University, in the first paragraph of her text on the *maskilot* (enlightened women) quotes Dan Miron denying the maskilots' existance as the significant phenomenon: "Throughtout the nineteenth century, Hebrew maskilot were a random phenomenon, which occurred only once or twice. These were the poor aftergrowths in the corners of the fields of rational Haskalah poetry and the sentimental poetry of Hibbat Zion"[2] Tova Cohen mentions the most known examples of the women writing in Hebrewlike: Miriam Markel--Mosessohn, Rachel Norpurgo and Devorah Ephrati, but still they were the "rare sights" of their time (19th century). More fascinating is the joint research of her and Schmuel Feiner and uncovering about thirty Hebrew women writers from the period of the Haskalah. The article is devoted to the analysis of some of the writings. We can learn that only a small proportion of the feminine writings can be classified as the literary ("in the conventional sence") and the author provides the examples. The rest of women's texts were letters and articles – saved as oryginals or printed in the periodicals. The contents of women's writing described the most often as "shared female experience" has been the subjects of deeper analysis by Tova Cohen. From the psychological base of the feminine Haskalah writing ("the anxiety of the autorship"), through palimsestic writing ("the strategy of maskilot") she gets to letter writing and „conceling authentic expression in a "feminine" genre, but also in canonical genres). The two texts has been presented as examples: Merka Altshuler's *Hegyonai leyom tu be'av* (Meditations on the Fifteenth of Av) and Sarah-Feiga Meinkin's *Ahavat yesharim* (The Love of the Righteous), the first hebrew novel to be written by a woman. In comparison to the novels by men at least two new or different elements

[1] Moshe Rosman reffers to some other publications, which he counts in the footnotes: J.W. Scott, *Gender and the Politics of the History*, pp. 22, 26, 29–31; N.Z. Davies, "Women's History" in Transition; the European Case, in: J.W. Scott (ed.), *Feminism and History* (Oxford, 1996), pp. 88–89.

[2] D. Miron, *Imahot meyasdot, ahayot horegot: Al shetei hathalot beshirah ha'erets-yisra'elit hamodernit*, Tel Aviv, 1991, II.

are very well visible in women's writing – the description of woman's daily life and household rituals as well as the relations between women, the characters. It all shows the maskilic attempts to capture the various components of Haskalah from the female perspective, focussing not on the ideaology but rather on human and emotional side of life. Yet, the author doesn't offer the complete analyses but suggests reading the female writing for "complete understanding of this period and literature," but maybe also Haskalah itself. Tova Cohen makes an attempt to place the maskilot in the (English) women's writing periods defined by Elaine Showalter (*Feminine* phase 1849–80, *Feminist* phase 1880–1920 and *Female* phase 1920–). As their works are parallel to the second – *Feminist* phase – it creates the possibility of the new idea to consider them as the first Jewish feminists, who apeared on the literary stage some decades earlier than is commonly believed. Following this idea – the maskilot may take over (chronologically) first position Deborah Baron and Nehama Pukhachevsky in the history of Jewish feminist writings.

Shulamit S. Magnus, an Associate Professor in the History Department of Oberlin College (the Chair and the Director of the Program in Jewish Studies there) has contributed to this volume of *POLIN* with the text *Sins of Youth, Guilt of a Grandmother: M.L. Lilienblum, Pauline Wengeroff, and the Telling of Jewish Modernity in Eastern Europe*. The title itself is the combination of the titles by the authors mentioned in it, and yet, it is also a very brief summary of the entire article. Moshe Leib Lilienblum's *Hatot neurim* (The Sins of the Youth, 1876) and Pauline Wengeroff's (born Pessele Epstein) *Memoiren einer Grossmutter* (Memoirs of the Grandmother, 1898) has been compared and analized by the Magnus. She discussed not only the issue of the language, personal background of the authors, but also the social and religious aspects of modernity emphasized by both of them. *Hatot neurim* is an epic tale in Hebrew of one maskil's life from being a teenager into his thirties, fighting the battles of Jewish modernity. Wengeroff writes less about herself, more about the society she was part of, but it is very specific writing – from the perspective of female experience. And so states the subtitle of her memoirs – written in German, with some phrases in Yiddish, Hebrew and Polish – *Bilder aus der Kulturgeschichte der Juden Russlands im 19. Jahrhundert* (Scenes from the Cultural History of the Jews of Russia in the 19th Century). Wangeroff's narrative is very different from the maskilic one, in this case – Lilienblum's. She is very nostalgic and sentimental when comes to the description of the traditional Jewish society, he is very critical. Despite the fact that their experience and status varried, we can find some simmilarities – and this is not just the described subject. In the method of writing for example – both of them used their personal sources from the past. Wangeroff included paragraphs of her diary, Lilienblum – his letters. Shulamit Magnus showes us these two different paths to Jewish modernity and by that also the gendered nature of this "odyssey." Hopefully it is just the beginning of the wider story.

The interest in Jewish girls education is represented in the article by Eliyana R. Adler – *Women's education in the Pages of Russian Press*. The author completed her dissertation (on private schools for Jewish girls in tsarist Russia) at Braindeis University. The article is based on the Jewish – Russian press, published in Hebrew, Russian and Yiddish. The issues Eliyana Adler has written about might be familiar to

the Polish readers of Bożena Borzymińska's book *Szkolnictwo żydowskie w Warszawie 1830–1870* (Jewish education in Warsaw 1830–1870). Majority of the texts commented and analyzed in the article had critisized the Jewish education or described the system in the second half of the 19th century. Yet we could also find various opinions on the Jewish girls' and women' education and the women's role in the society. They were presented among the others in *Sion* (Russian-language periodical), *Russkii evrei*, *Rassvet* and the Hebrew Journal *Hakarmel*. Adler efforts to include variety of the writers and journalists as well as both male and female points of view have to be mentioned. At the same time these voices do not express the evolution which took place in the discussion in the second half of the 19th century. Adler's article is focused on the period from 1860s to the early 1880s, so – as she is aware of – it could not include later more ideological discussions and solutions to the entire Jewish educational system.

More specific aspect of Jewish women education is analized by Carole B. Balin in *The Call to Serve: Jewish Medical Students in Russia, 1872–1887*. Balin – the Associate Professor of History at Hebrew Union College – Jewish Institute of Religion in New York – is the author of the book on Jewish Women Writers in Tsarist Russia. In the article he describes the role the Women's Medical Cources (WMC) in Petersburg had played in educating Jewish women, but also making possible some social changes in the Jewish society. High persentage of Jewish students at WMC and succesful graduation resulted with the professional group of Jewish *kursistkas* who were in fact trained as medical doctors. Balin offers the picture of all the challenges the candidates had to face. She analyzes social structure of the students and their every day life. As the result – we get a very interesting story of how to escape from the limitations of real and symbolic "zone of settlement".

When Chava left Home: Gender, Conversion, and the Jewish Family in Tsarist Russia by Chaeran Freeze offers a great analises of conversion among Jewish women. This text is related to Freeze's book *Jewish Marrige and Divorce in Impperial Russia*, a winner of the several awards. Excellent picture of the conversion process and social consequesces answers many questions on the subject and leaves in hunger to know more about the story represented by the youngest daughter of Tevje the Milkman. Freeze describes in details the conversion narratives about the Jewish family and the families' responces to conversion. She analyzes also the post-conversion life and problems as well as challanges and tensions in mixed-marriages.

Rachel Manekin, who teaches at the Hebrew University and works in the the central Archives for the History of Jewish People in Jerusalem, presents *The Lost Generation – Education and Female Conversion in Fin-de-Siecle Kraków*. It might seem as the continuation of the Freeze's topic, but the circumstances and conditions described by Manekin are different but the same fascinating. My personal interest in the history of Kraków Jews made the reading of the article even more exciting. Manekin, while writing about the fate of young women who decided to convert and abandon their families, offers the information about the Felician convent in the entire process of the conversion itself, but also in education and accomodation (sometimes hiding). Many examples of the individuals' fascinating stories made the picture complete. Yet, I would not agree with the title of the article – cause despite the fact that it might be

just a metaphor – about 300 registered conversions among Jewish women (in the analyzed period) does not make the lost generation. It does not mean questioning the great importance of this part of Jewish women's history in Kraków.

The first part reviewed volume of POLIN includes two other interesting articles on feminism and literature by Ellen Kellman (*Feminism and Fiction; Khane Blanksteyn's Role in the Inter-War Vilna*) and Eva Plach (*Feminism and Nationalism on the Pages of "Ewa: Tygodnik" 1928–1933*), as well as *Interview with Professor Jadwiga Mauer* (by Katarzyna Zechenter) and *Bibliography: Jewish Women in Eastern Europe* prepared by Karen Auerbach.

As this review has the limited length I am not able to include the analyses of the interesting and constructively critical reviews of the recent publications. I would like only to mention just some of them. Rellated to the main topic of the volume are the two of the reviewed books. Carole B. Balin's *To Reveal Our Hearts: Jewish Women Writers in Tsarist Russia* is reviewed by Sarah Abrevaya Stein, who shares the author's admiration to the five extraordinary Jewish Russian women's lives described in the book (Miriam Markel-Mosessohn, Chava Shapiro, Rashel Mironovna Khin, Feiga Israilevna Kogan and Sofiya Dubnova-Erlikh). Another publication – *My Life as a Radical Jewish Woman: the Memoirs of a Zionist Feminist in Poland* – by Puah Rakovsky (ed. Paula E. Hyman, trans. Barbara Harshaw), has been analysed by Harriet Freidenreich. She offers a brief biography of Puah Rakovsky (1865–1955) praising her writings as "inspiring memoir chronicling the trials and tribulations of a remarkable individual and helping us understand east European Jewish history from a Zionist feminist perspective."

The volume is closed by the two obituaries – of Dora Katznelson (1921–2003) and Adam Penkalla (1944–2003), both known in Poland, at least to the people interested in Jewish history and culture.

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